



Senator Don Carlson

2003 SESSION E-UPDATE FROM OLYMPIA

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Senate committee assignments: Higher Education,
chair; Children and Family Services and Corrections;
Education

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Dear Friends,

Greetings to all. The 2003 legislative session has begun. The scheduled 105-day session is supposed to end April 27. As a way to help keep you informed on what's happening in Olympia, I'm again providing a legislative update via e-mail. I intend to send out an update every other Friday to let you know about key issues, bills that I'm prime-sponsoring, upcoming legislation and informative tidbits. As always, please contact my office with any concerns or questions. If you don't want to receive these e-mail updates, please let me know. My legislative e-mail address is Carlson_do@leg.wa.gov, and my Olympia office phone number is (360) 786-7696. If you want to visit me in Olympia, my office address is 102 Irv Newhouse Building on the Capitol Campus. If you want to contact me via snail mail, my address is PO Box 40449, Olympia, WA 98504-0449. It is a pleasure and honor to serve you.

Sincerely,

Sen. Don Carlson, 49th Legislative District

Budget deficit now at \$2.4 billion

The state's operating budget deficit has grown to a staggering \$2.4 billion, the largest in Washington state history. Legislators are faced with the tough task of deciding whether to cut spending or raise taxes to fix the budget problem.

While I realize that some cuts will have to be made to important services offered by various state agencies, I believe that this \$2.4 billion hole can't be entirely filled by cuts alone. Some tax increases will have to be enacted to help fix the budget, even at a time when tax hikes are unpopular with many citizens. I'd like

to hear what you think about our state's budget problem and how we should best address it. We will cut spending! Should we raise taxes? If yes, where?

Improving the state's business climate is crucial

Much of the state's budget deficit is due to sharply declining revenue caused by our economic recession. Washington's unemployment rate in December, when adjusted for seasonal factors, rose to 6.8 percent, up from 6.7 percent in November. Economic experts predict it will take Washington a year and a half longer than other states to recover from the recession.

Because of our high unemployment rate, it is crucial for the Legislature to help create more jobs in our state. In fact, my Senate Republican colleagues and I view the economy and job creation as the Legislature's top priority. One way to help make that happen is to improve the state's business climate.

In meetings with local business owners, a common complaint that I've heard is how complex and overwhelming our state regulatory system is and how state regulators treat businesses as adversaries. This is sadly ironic when you consider how dependent state government is on Washington's economy for the revenue needed to function.

This session, several bills have been introduced in the Senate to help improve Washington's business climate and make our state more competitive. These measures include:

- ◆ Delaying the effect of significant legislative rules for one year so the Legislature can see if they were implemented as intended.
- ◆ Requiring the governor's approval of all state agency rules, similar to what is done now for all bills passed by the Legislature.
- ◆ Requiring agencies to provide notice to businesses of rules that are likely to affect them.
- ◆ Prohibiting agencies from adopting rules that exceed federal standards unless the Legislature specifically authorizes it.
- ◆ Repealing the state ergonomics rule proposed by the Department of Labor and Industries and prohibiting new ergonomics rules from being enacted unless required by the federal government.

Transportation problems still unresolved

As you know, Washington voters soundly defeated Referendum 51, which would have increased the state gas tax and other taxes and fees to raise about \$7.8 billion for state transportation needs. Since the start of session, the House Republicans and House Democrats have unveiled their own transportation plans to show citizens that our transportation system is undergoing additional efficiency and accountability reforms. Senate Republicans are working with our Democratic colleagues on a comprehensive transportation accountability and funding package to address our highway needs. At this point, it's hard to say how large of a gas tax increase will be proposed, although it won't be as much as R-51's

proposed 9-cent-a-gallon hike. Let me know how much of a gas tax increase, if any, you would support.

Bills that I'm prime-sponsoring this year

I want to provide you with a brief rundown of some of the bills that I've introduced this session:

- ◆ Senate Bill 5133 adopts the revised interstate compact for juveniles. The compact has been in Washington law since 1955. Each state in the compact is responsible for the proper supervision or return of juveniles, delinquents, and offenders who are on probation or parole and who have escaped or run away from supervision and in doing so have endangered their own safety and the safety of others. Each state is responsible for the safe return of juveniles who have run away from home and in doing so have left their state of residence. This measure allows Washington to be involved in revising the rules related to interstate supervision, training, transfers and other issues. The measure is now before the Senate Children and Family Services and Corrections Committee.
- ◆ Senate Bill 5134 makes permanent the border county higher education program involving Washington and Oregon. This program increases the number of higher educational opportunities for people living on both sides of the state border by allowing them to pay resident tuition rates at those institutions located in the border counties. Since being created in 1999, this successful program has been very helpful for Clark County residents who want a higher education but don't want to travel far to receive one. There are several good colleges and universities in the greater Portland-Vancouver area alone. If you live in Vancouver and want to pursue a certain degree, this program can allow you to do that while staying put and paying resident tuition instead of going to school in Seattle or Bellingham. The bill is in the Senate Higher Education Committee.
- ◆ Senate Bill 5135 requires students who linger at Washington public universities and colleges to pay higher tuition. Specifically, the bill requires college students who accumulate 120 percent or more of their credits needed to graduate -- but still haven't managed to finish their degree requirements -- to pay the entire cost of their continuing education. The bill's goal is to encourage students to finish their coursework as close as possible to four years instead of taking six years or longer. The idea is that this would help create more enrollment space in our colleges and universities at a time when some schools have to turn away students due to overenrollment. The measure is before the Higher Education Committee.
- ◆ Senate Bill 5136 adds the superintendent of public instruction to the Higher Education Coordinating Board. It is in the Higher Education Committee.
- ◆ Senate Bill 5137 authorizes the use of the reading and math components of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) to fulfill admission requirements at higher education institutions. The proposal has been referred to the Senate Higher Education Committee.

- ◆ Senate Bill 5138 authorizes the use of the WASL for qualifying for the state's Promise Scholarship and other purposes. This bill is in the Senate Education Committee.
- ◆ Senate Bill 5158 expands the definition of a resident student for higher education. Specifically, any person who has completed a full senior year at a Washington high school and obtained a diploma from that high school, or any person that has received the equivalent of a high school diploma, is permitted to pay resident tuition at Washington public universities and colleges if the person has lived in the state for at least three years and has been admitted to such an institution within a year of receiving the diploma or its equivalent. The person must also provide to the institution an affidavit indicating a willingness to file an application to become a permanent resident at the earliest opportunity the individual is eligible to do so. The measure has been referred to the Senate Higher Education Committee.